

AN UNUSUAL CASE OF MORTALITY IN THE AUSTRALIAN PELICAN

by Peter Panquee and John L. McKean *

On 22 August 1978 whilst counting waterfowl and large mammals in the vicinity of Round Billabong, Kapalga, N.T. (lat. 12° 28'S long. 132°20'E) we noticed a dead Pelican *Pelecanus conspicillatus* in the Billabong with what appeared to be a fishing net caught in its bill. Closer investigation revealed that what we thought to be mesh of a net was actually the scales of a huge Barramundi *Scleropages jardini*. The head of the fish was very tightly wedged into the throat of the Pelican and it would

seem safe to assume that the Pelican had died by choking whilst attempting to swallow the fish. We were not able to return with a camera for another two days, however, despite the scavenging activities of various raptors, enough remained to illustrate the truth of that rhyme 'A wonderous bird is the Pelican; its bill can hold more than its belly can!'"

* C/ CSIRO,
Division of Wildlife Research,
P.O. Box 39998,
WINNELLIE N.T. 5789

